Among the Apple Trees

A Story of Farm Life

By CLIFFORD V. GREGORY

CHAPTER XII.

THE first glance told Gladys of the suffering that her father had been through. His face was haggard and worn, and his shoulders were stooped wearily.

"I didn't want to take you out of school," he said, "but mother's been calling for you and calling for you until I just had to send."

Gladys tiptoed to the room where her mother lay sleeping. She was tossing uneasily and muttering incoherently. Gladys dropped to her knees in front of the bed and threw her arms about her mother's neck.

"I'M GOING TO STAY ALWAYS NOW," SHE SAID.

"Oh, mommie, mommie!" she cried. "It's Gladys, your own little girl! Don't you know me?"

"No, it can't be Gladys," her mother answered. "Gladys and Mabel are away to school, and it's so lonely."

Gladys soothed her to sleep again and then sent her father to bed to get some much needed rest. All through that long night her mother tossed and talked at intervals, and the watching girl realized for the first time just how much of a sacrifice it had been for this quiet little mother to give up her girls to the great, hungry college.

In the morning the doctor came and pronounced Mrs. Sanders better.

"Just you stay here and take care of her, young lady," he said, "and I'll guarantee that she'll get well all right. It's just this everlasting loneliness that's got on her mind and made her sick in the first place."

The doctor's prediction seemed to be correct, for Mrs. Sanders slowly but surely improved from that time on. In a couple of weeks she was able to sit up, and her eyes lighted up with pleasure as she watched Gladys fly about the room setting things to rights and lending a brightness to the house that was so pitifully lacking when she was away.

"You don't know how much good it does me to see you here," her mother said one day as Gladys came in with a big armful of blossoms, "to bring outdoors in to mommie," as she said.

Gladys dropped the flowers and came over and kissed her. "I'm going to stay always now," she said.

It was a couple of days later that her father came out where she was feeding the chickens one morning. "I reckon it's about time for you to be going back to school, isn't it?" he said quietly. "I guess I can get along all right with mother now."

Gladys looked up quickly. "I'm not going back," she said.

"Not going back!" he cried, his eyes lighting up with a sudden hope.

"No," she answered, with a brave attempt to smile. "I've had my good time, and now I'm going to stay here and make things easy for you and mommie."

The happiness that shone in her father's face was worth all the sacrifice, albeit it was a guilty happiness as he thought of what it meant to her. But she cut short his objections by telling him it was time to go and feed the pigs and then ran into the house with a merry song on her lips.

A few days later Jeff came over one evening after supper. He found Gladys out in the orchard with her arms full of the fragrant apple blossoms.

"They're so thick the tree would kill itself trying to raise so many apples," she said. "And then mommie likes the flowers so well."

"How do you like farming?" she went on. "Is it as much fun as going to school?"

"Almost," he acknowledged. "You must come over and see the place. There isn't a weed on it, and I've got the cornfields in the best shape for planting of any I've seen anywhere."

"I'm afraid you're getting vain," said Gladys, smiling at his enthusiasm. "I'm going to be a farmer, too," she added.

"You don't mean you're not going back?"

She nodded.

"Then maybe you do understand?"

"Yes, I think I do. It's hard—in a way—but it will be fun too. You'll have to work if you make good your boast of having the best farm in the county. Just wait till you see what I'm going to do with this."

He stood looking at her in silence for a moment. That stray lock was out of place again, and in the dim moonlight, dimmer for sifting through the millions of apple blossoms, she looked like some woodland fairy come to touch the blossoms with her magic wand and turn them into tiny apples.

"I don't like competition, Gladys," said Jeff, taking a step nearer. "I wonder—can't we be partners?"

Perhaps she nodded, or perhaps it was only the flickering shadows that made him think so, but the next moment he had caught her in his arms, apple blossoms and all, and was telling her that he had loved her ever since that time she nearly scared him out of the apple tree. And for once she didn't accuse him of talking foolishly.

The apple blossoms faded and fell, and summer came to fulfill the promises of spring. Mabel came home from college again, protesting against allowing Gladys to stay home while she finished her course. But Gladys was firm and had her way, as usual.

One evening nearly three weeks after she came home Mabel was sitting on the porch idly fingering the strings of her mandolin and trying not to feel lonely. Gladys had gone riding with Jeff, and the sight of their happiness somehow made Mabel feel lonesome and left out, though she tried to drive the feeling away by playing and humming some of the dear old melodies.

Suddenly she was aroused from her reverie by the sound of an automobile coming up the driveway. It stopped at the gate, and Harold leaped out and hurried over to where she was sitting.

"Won't you come for an auto ride," he pleaded, "just for old times' sake—for the sake of those old songs you were playing?"

"I was thinking of old times," said Mabel as she rose and followed him down to the gate. "Do you remember the time you maneuvered to get me in the back seat with Both," she went on mischievously as he helped her to the driver's seat.

"That was a different Harold," he said. "Those old days seem like a dream more than they do like part of my real life."

"You have changed," said Mabel, eying him approvingly.

"And I have you to thank for it," he said. "You have made a man of me, Mabel. I used to think of nothing but my own good times, but now—well, you've taught me to look at things differently. Did you hear about—about what's been going on at Iowa City?"

"I read in the paper something about a big mass meeting where Harold Du Val made a speech the like of which had never been heard at the university before and where the students agreed unanimously to put a stop to betting on athletic events," she replied. "Why didn't you ever write and tell me what you were doing?"

"I thought you'd find out anyway if I did anything worth while," he said, "and if I didn't you had better not know."

"I think it was glorious," said Mabel.

"Do you think I've squared things now?" he asked.

"Yes, I believe you have," she replied, "and more too."

"And now may I have my reward?"

"Your reward?" she said inquiringly. "Isn't it enough reward to be deservedly the most popular man in a great university?"

"That isn't anything," he replied. "I didn't do it for popularity, Mabel, and I'm afraid I never would have done it just to even things up, but I did it because a certain brown eyed girl told me to. And the brown eyed girl is the reward I want, Mabel. Can't you tell me that you care for me just a little?"

Mabel looked up at him gravely. "Are you quite sure that it isn't Gladys that you care for?" she asked.

"Perfectly," he answered. "It was that other Harold that cared for Gladys. That was before I had learned to know what a true woman's love is really worth. But I know it's hoping too much," he added bitterly, turning his head away.

"The only way to get things is to ask for them," she replied, with a little laugh, "or just take them."

He turned quickly toward her "Then"— he cried.

She nodded.

And then the auto wandered along at its own sweet will until the spark coil obligingly burned out just as they reached the most secluded spot in the whole road, and only an inquisitive owl in a nearby tree heard the rest.

THE END.

The Plankton.

When the voyager across the Atlantic watches the surface of the sea day after day and notes how few are the signs of life in so vast an expanse of waters he is apt to conclude that, as compared with the land, the ocean is a desert. But he has been looking for fish and has not seen the real myriads of the ocean. If the voyager had microscope eyes he would perceive that the liquid mass through which his ship plows her way is filled with a prodigious multitude of minute organisms—the plankton. The name comes from a Greek word meaning vagabond. The plankton forms the food of an enormous number of marine animals and has been the subject of much scientific investigation. There are two kinds of plankton, the vegetable, or phytoplankton, and the animal, or zooplankton. As in the world of higher organisms, the animal feeds upon the vegetable. The importance of the phytoplankton to the life of the sea depends upon the fact that, like the leaves of land plants, it has the faculty, under the influence of light, of assimilating inorganic substances and rendering them available for the food of animals.—Youth's Companion